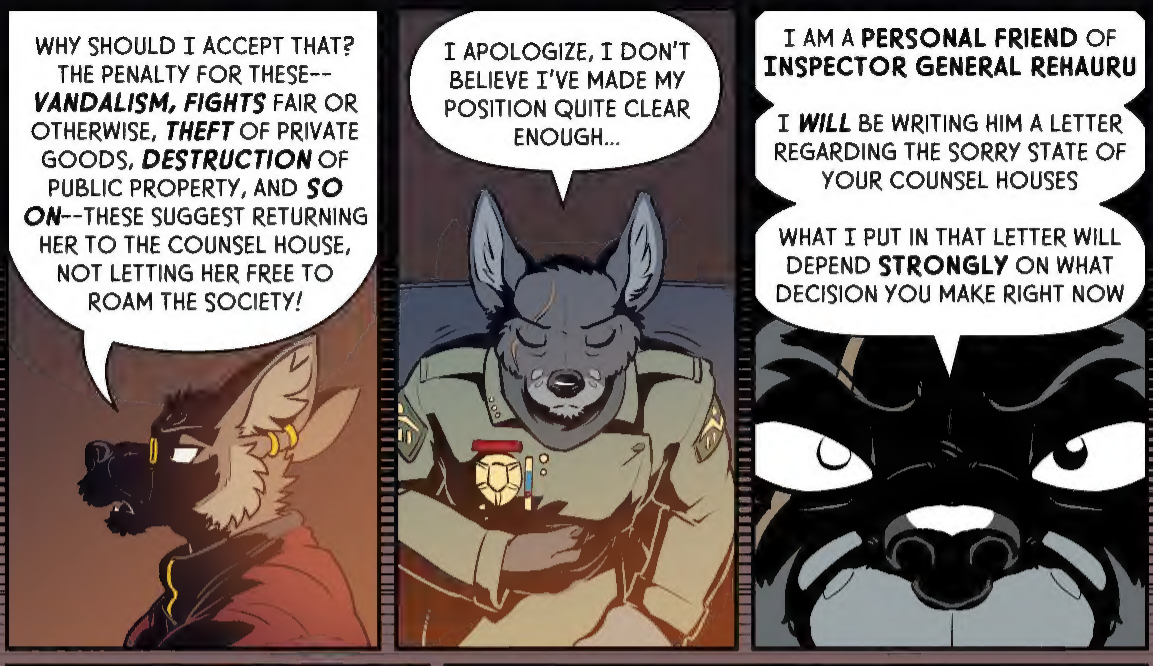
...YOU WANT ME TO REWARD IDEKA WITH A TRAVEL PASS?
A TRAVEL PASS IS NOT TO BE DANGLED OVER HER HEAD LIKE A REWARD
YOU'VE NEVER EVEN PROMISED ONE TO HER!
IDEKA IS A CITIZEN OF THIS CITY AND SHE IS WANTED FOR QUESTIONING REGARDING SEVERAL DOZEN INCIDENTS. BUT SINCE SHE IS NOW, FINALLY, TRUSTBONDED WITH A GENERAL IN THE ARMY OF THE SOCIETY, SHE CAN FINALLY ANSWER FOR THOSE--
SHE HAS NOT TRUSTBONDED WITH ME
THEN WHY ADVOCATE FOR HER?
BECAUSE NOBODY ELSE WILL. AND EVERYONE NEEDS AN ADVOCATE, TRUSTBONDED OR NOT
SHE REFUSES TO ENTER A PLEA FOR ANY AND ALL INCIDENTS REGARDING DELINQUENT BEHAVIOR
RULE AS YOU WISH. IF YOU WISH TO PUNISH HER, I SUGGEST A SENTENCE OF EXILE FROM THIS CITY FOR A DURATION OF NO LONGER THAN TEN YEARS, SHOULD SHE EVER WANT TO RETURN AT ALL


WHY SHOULD I ACCEPT THAT? THE PENALTY FOR THESE-- ***VANDALISM, FIGHTS*** FAIR OR OTHERWISE, ***THEFT*** OF PRIVATE GOODS, ***DESTRUCTION*** OF PUBLIC PROPERTY, AND ***SO ON***--THESE SUGGEST RETURNING HER TO THE COUNSEL HOUSE, NOT LETTING HER FREE TO ROAM THE SOCIETY!
I APOLOGIZE, I DON'T BELIEVE I'VE MADE MY POSITION QUITE CLEAR ENOUGH...
I AM A **PERSONAL FRIEND** OF **INSPECTOR GENERAL REHAURU**
I ***WILL*** BE WRITING HIM A LETTER REGARDING THE SORRY STATE OF YOUR COUNSEL HOUSES
WHAT I PUT IN THAT LETTER WILL DEPEND **STRONGLY** ON WHAT DECISION YOU MAKE RIGHT NOW

THE WITCH OF KURIKUTO

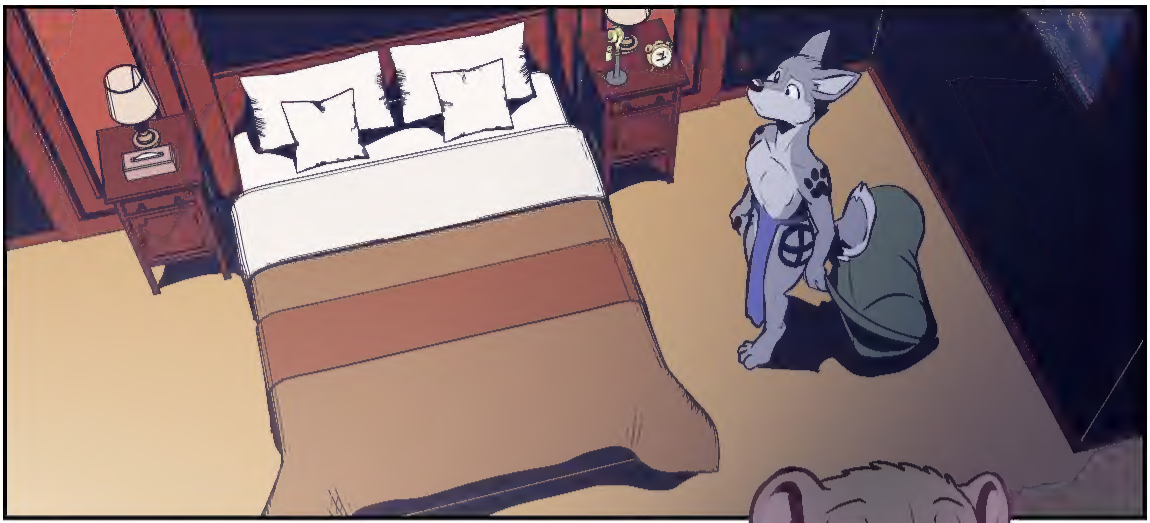
IN THE NEW AGE

Part II
Why We Build the Wall

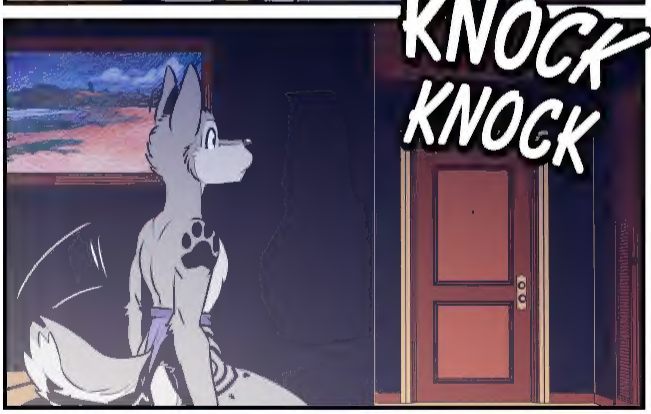
By Rick Griffin
Colors by Jonas

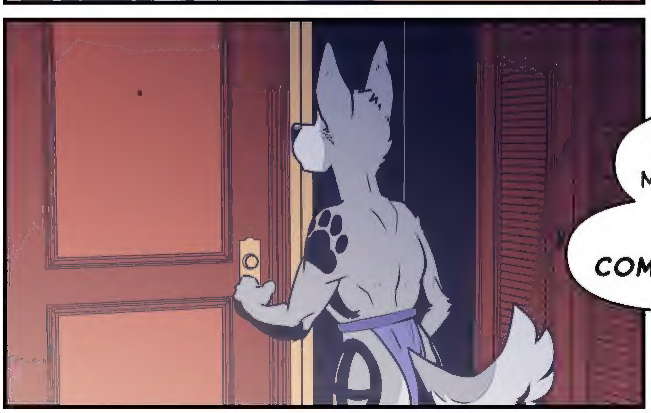
NEXT STOP: AZUKAZARE RESORT CITY!
AZUKAZARE? I... THOUGHT WE WERE GOING ON TO KARSAKAR
CHANGE OF PLANS. ORO AND I ARE LONG OVERDUE A VACATION
AND WE THOUGHT, YOU KNOW... YOU NEEDED A REAL CHANGE OF SCENERY
...THESE PLACES SURE HAVE GOTTEN A LOT... MORE. WHEN I WAS YOUNG IT WAS BASICALLY JUST A BEACH...
I KNOW WHAT YOU MEAN--NOW IT'S A CHOICE BETWEEN COMING HERE TO RELAX, OR JUST FINDING DISTRACTIONS
I DON'T KNOW IF I'M CAPABLE OF RELAXING...

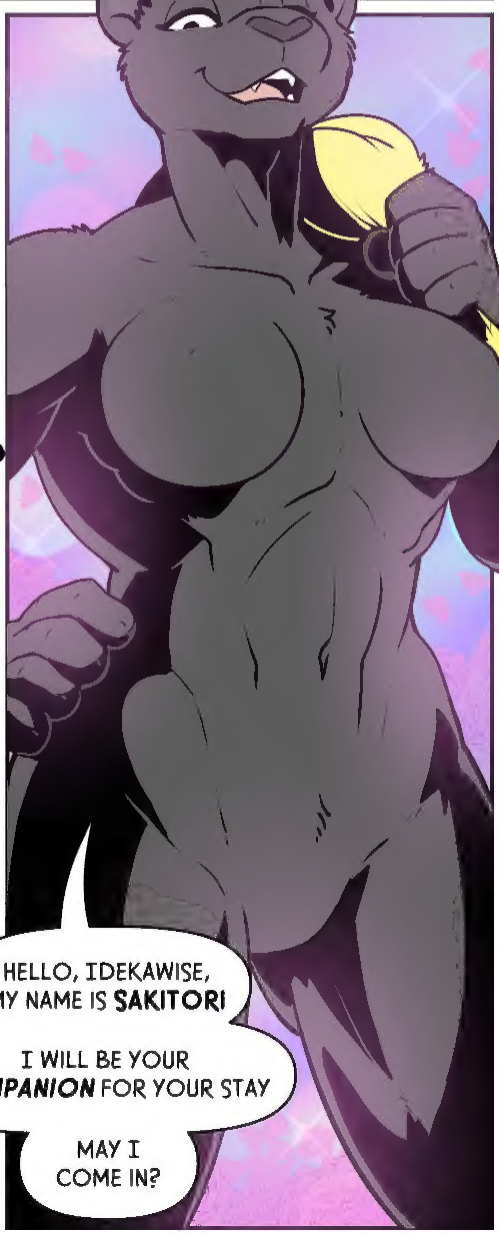
ROOM FOR THREE?
JUST ONE, FOR THE LADY
WAIT, WHY ARE YOU POSTING ME UP HERE?
THIS IS THE BEST HOTEL IN THE CITY FOR REGULAR VISITORS
ITS SERVICES WOULD BE WASTED ON TWO OLD SOLDIERS
IT'S WASTED ON ME
YOU OF ALL ROKO NEED EVERY OUNCE OF PAMPERING. ALL I'M GOING TO BE DOING IS SLEEPING AND LAYING ON THE BEACH
AND WORKING OUT, HE DOES LIKE TO KEEP IN SHAPE
IDEKA... YOU'RE A GOOD WUL
LET THIS PLACE HEAL YOU
IT'D TAKE A MIRACLE
GOOD THING I BELIEVE IN MIRACLES



OKAY, CITY, I WANNA FEEL LIKE WHEN I WAS YOUNG, SO MAKE WITH THE HAPPINESS ALREADY


KNOCK KNOCK




HELLO, IDEKAWISE, MY NAME IS SAKITORI
I WILL BE YOUR COMPANION FOR YOUR STAY
MAY I COME IN?

I'M SORRY, IS THIS A BAD TIME?
COME IN
UH... DO YOU COME WITH THE ROOM OR DID ORODACHI ORDER YOU SPECIAL?
THAT'S ONE AND THE SAME
ORO--IS HE YOUR MATE?
FRIEND
I EXPECT THIS IS HIS IDEA OF MAKING A MIRACLE HAPPEN...
THEN YOU HAVE AN INCREDIBLY GENEROUS FRIEND
AS YOU MIGHT IMAGINE, COMPANION SERVICES ARE RATHER IN DEMAND... ORO MUST HAVE SAVED UP QUITE A FEW VACATION PERMITS
HE'S A GENERAL IN THE ARMY
WELL!
I ALMOST NEVER GET THIS MUCH TIME WITH A CLIENT. YOU AND I ARE GOING TO HAVE THE NEXT TWENTY-EIGHT DAYS TOGETHER
ALL MONTH?!

SO... I'VE NEVER, UH... BEEN *WITH* A COMPANION BEFORE...
THEN LEMME EXPLAIN HOW THIS WORKS!
WHILE MY SERVICES *PRIMARILY* REVOLVE AROUND SEX, MY JOB IS TO DO *WHATEVER* YOU NEED TO FEEL COMFORTABLE
IF YOU WANT TO GO TO THE ARCADE AND PLAY PINBALL FOR THE NEXT MONTH, THAT'S WHAT WE'LL DO
YOU LIKE PINBALL?
DO YOU KNOW HOW OFTEN I PROMPT MY CLIENTS WITH THAT AND THEY *NEVER* TAKE ME UP ON IT?

IDEKA...
I'M NOT USUALLY UPFRONT WITH A CLIENT ABOUT THIS SORT OF THING, BUT...
IS SOMETHING THE MATTER?

UNDERSTAND I DON'T MIND, I *LOVE* GETTING TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT WITH A CLIENT
BUT JUST TO MAKE SURE THAT YOU'RE NOT LEFT UNFULFILLED--YOU *DON'T NEED TO BE CHASTE WITH ME*. SLEEPING WITH CLIENTS IS PART OF MY JOB
NOW I UNDERSTAND IF YOU'RE *NERVOUS*, BUT--
I'D... I'D *LIKE* TO, BUT...
...OHHHH
I *THOUGHT* SOMETHING WAS UP WHEN YOU SAID ORO WASN'T YOUR MATE
WH-WHAT DO YOU MEAN BY THAT!

THAT INCREDIBLY STRAPPING SOLDIER, USING HIS VACATION PERMITS TO PUT YOU UP IN A NICE HOTEL?
HE'S FOND OF YOU
I NOTICED...
AND IT'S NOT LIKE THE FEELING ISN'T MUTUAL, IT'S JUST...
I HAVE SOME... NEGATIVE FEELINGS I NEED TO WORK OUT FIRST
FEELINGS HE THOUGHT A COMPANION MIGHT HELP YOU WITH?
WELL, MY FIRST TIME WAS PROBABLY NEVER GOING TO BE WITH A MALE
OBVIOUSLY, I NEED SOMEONE TO PRACTICE ON, BEFORE ANYTHING SO PERMANENT AS A MATEBOND
N-NOT THAT ORO'S MY FIRST CHOICE OR ANYTHING! WE JUST MET--WELL, RE-MET-- A FEW WEEKS AGO!
NO, NO, I UNDERSTAND!
SO, IF YOU'RE COMFORTABLE WITH IT, LET'S TRY ESCALATING THINGS SLOWLY
HOW SO?
WELL TO START, I'M TRAINED IN MASSAGE-
YES

OW
OW
OW
I'LL BE HONEST, I'VE WORKED ON SOLDIERS WITH LESS TENSION IN THEIR MUSCLES
IS THAT BAD...?

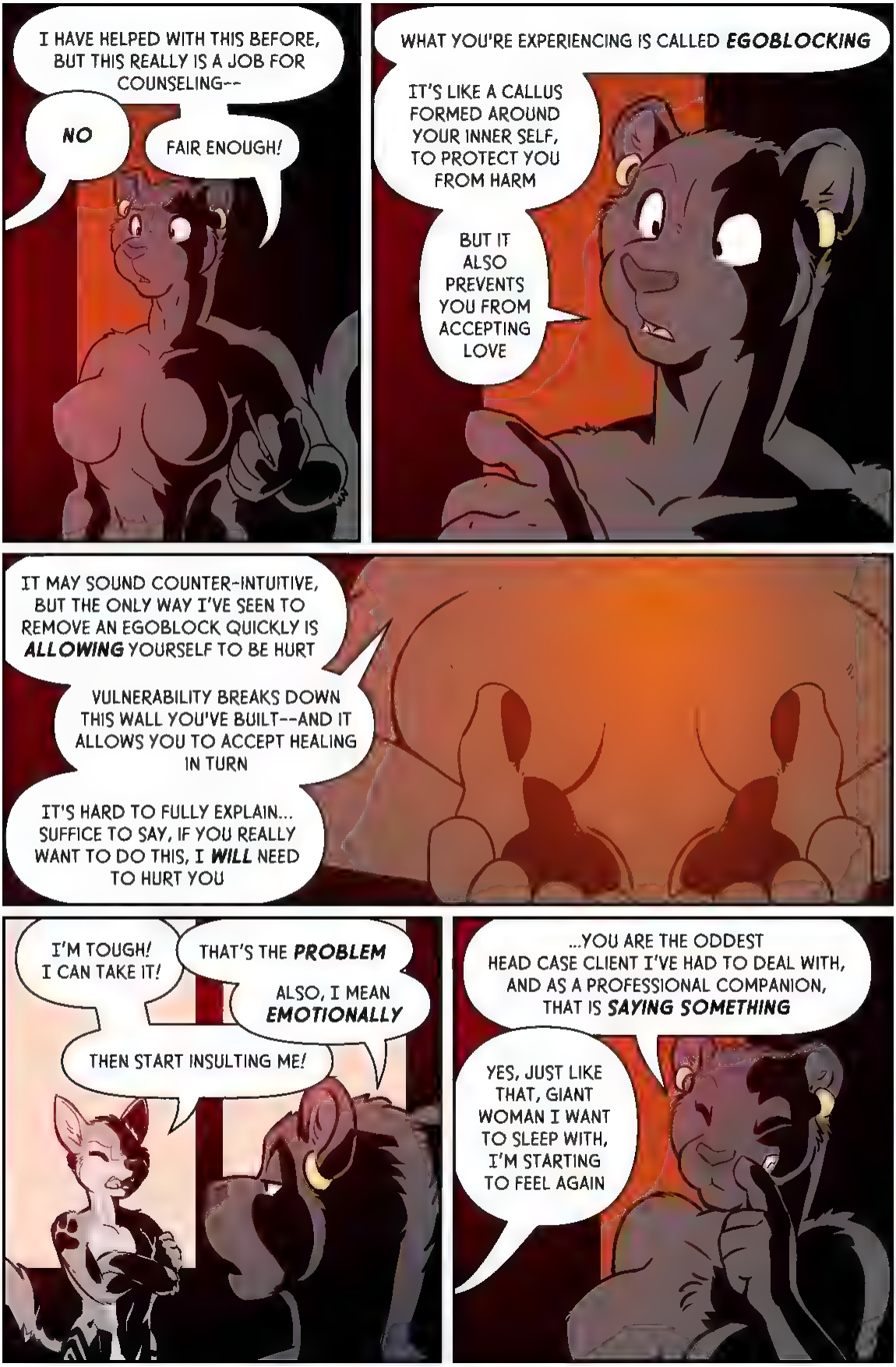
IT'S OKAY! IF YOU HAVEN'T RELAXED A MUSCLE IN A WHILE, IT'S GOING TO HURT TO GET IT MOVING CORRECTLY AGAIN
BUT I'M NOT DAMAGING IT. I'M JUST TRYING TO EASE IT BACK INTO POSITION, SO IT REMEMBERS WHAT IT'S LIKE TO RELAX
THAT'S A METAPHOR IF I'VE EVER HEARD ONE

YOU HAVE LOVELY TATTOOS, BY THE WAY

I ASSUME THEY'RE A CLAN MARK--I ALMOST NEVER SEE ROKO USE CLAN MARKS ANYMORE
IT'S A SHAME; I LOVE BODY ART

...IDEKA? WHAT'S WRONG?

SAKI... I HAVEN'T... TOLD YOU EVERYTHING...
I'M LISTENING
I CAN'T SEEM TO TRUSTBOND WITH ANYONE
AT ALL
OH
BELIEVE ME, I'VE TRIED-- I'M FINALLY IN A PLACE WHERE ROKO WON'T INSIST I CHANGE FOR THEM, AND IT LOOKS SO BEAUTIFUL
I'VE TRIED WITH ORO AND WITH BASTION, AND THEY'RE BOTH THE SWEETEST ROKO I'VE EVER MET
BUT THEY HAVE THEIR OWN LIVES, THEIR OWN TRUSTBONDS
HOW WOULD I FIT IN? HOW CAN I COMMIT WHEN IT ALWAYS FEELS LIKE...
...LIKE I'M GOING TO BE ABANDONED AGAIN?
HRM
UNTIL WE CAN GET PAST THAT, THAT'S GOING TO PUT A DAMPER ON THE SEX...
I KNOW, RIGHT?!


I HAVE HELPED WITH THIS BEFORE, BUT THIS REALLY IS A JOB FOR COUNSELING--
NO
FAIR ENOUGH!
WHAT YOU'RE EXPERIENCING IS CALLED EGOBLOCKING
IT'S LIKE A CALLUS FORMED AROUND YOUR INNER SELF, TO PROTECT YOU FROM HARM
BUT IT ALSO PREVENTS YOU FROM ACCEPTING LOVE
IT MAY SOUND COUNTER-INTUITIVE, BUT THE ONLY WAY I'VE SEEN TO REMOVE AN EGOBLOCK QUICKLY IS ALLOWING YOURSELF TO BE HURT
VULNERABILITY BREAKS DOWN THIS WALL YOU'VE BUILT--AND IT ALLOWS YOU TO ACCEPT HEALING IN TURN
IT'S HARD TO FULLY EXPLAIN... SUFFICE TO SAY, IF YOU REALLY WANT TO DO THIS, I WILL NEED TO HURT YOU
I'M TOUGH! I CAN TAKE IT!
THAT'S THE PROBLEM
ALSO, I MEAN EMOTIONALLY
THEN START INSULTING ME!
...YOU ARE THE ODDEST HEAD CASE CLIENT I'VE HAD TO DEAL WITH, AND AS A PROFESSIONAL COMPANION, THAT IS SAYING SOMETHING
YES, JUST LIKE THAT, GIANT WOMAN I WANT TO SLEEP WITH, I'M STARTING TO FEEL AGAIN

SERIOUSLY, EGOBLOCKING IS IN PART A MATTER OF USING YOUR PRIDE TO DEFLECT
SO WHAT I NEED TO DO IS BREAK YOUR PRIDE IN FRONT OF AN AUDIENCE
I AM NOT GETTING ON STAGE AND DOING IMPROV IN FRONT OF A BUNCH OF STRANGERS!
ROT NO, WE NEED TO LEAVE YOU WITH THE CAPACITY TO RECOVER
I MEANT MORE LIKE A HIGH-STAKES GAME
SAKI, WE'VE ALREADY PLAYED EVERYTHING AT THE ARCADE--DID YOU SEE ME LOSE ONCE?
I AM WHAT MY TEACHERS FLIPPANTLY CALLED A PRODIGY
THEN LET'S DO SOMETHING MORE PHYSICAL!
WHAT DO YOU HAVE IN MIND?
YOU DIDN'T SAY THE STADIUM WOULD BE THIS PACKED
DOCTOR'S ORDERS, HON, TAKE YOUR MEDICINE

SAKI! SAKI! SAKI!
APPLAUSE
GO SAKI!
WHO IS THAT GORGEOUS WUL?
WOO HOO!
WHILE WE'RE PREPARING FOR THE NEXT ROUND OF BARRAGEBALL QUALIFIERS, WE'VE GOT A 1V1 SPECIAL MATCH--PLEASE WELCOME BACK OUR NINETEEN-TIME AMATEUR CHAMPION SAKITORI!
I LOVE YOU SAKI!!!
CLAP CLAP CLAP
OH, THE CROWD LOVES HER! I DARE THINK SOME OF YOU LADIES HAVE MET HER BEFORE-- I KNOW I HAVE!
CHEER
WHISTLE
YEAH!
HI, DARI! THANKS FOR GETTING US IN ON SHORT NOTICE!
IF YOU'RE WONDERING WHO HER ENIGMATIC OPPONENT IS--ALL I GOT IS A NAME: IDEKAWISE OF LUSKA!
PFFFFF
LOOK AT THAT STANCE! SHE'S GOT SOME FEROCITY TO HER! HEY IDEKA, IF YOU'RE NOT DOING ANYTHING AFTER THE TOURNAMENT--
WHAT ABOUT ME, HUH?
SQUEEZE IN A THIRD?
WE'LL TALK!

THIS WILL BE A QUICK MATCH--TEN MINUTES PLUS OVERTIME--BUT SAKI ASSURES ME IT'S SOMETHING YOU ***WON'T*** WANT TO MISS!
YOU GONNA TELL ME WHAT WE'RE PLAYING FOR NOW?
HERE'S THE STAKES: YOU WIN AND I ***DOUBLE*** OUR CONTRACT TIME
I'M LIKING THIS SO FAR...
YOU LOSE, AND OUR CONTRACT IS ***OFF***
?!
WHISTLE

WHACK!
SAKI WITH AN INTIMIDATING *HIGH VELOCITY SPIN!*
FIRST POINT TO SAKITORI!
PAK
YOU'RE *JOKING,* RIGHT?!
I HAVE NOTHING ELSE TO HOLD A FIRE TO YOUR TAIL!

OUR MYSTERIOUS WUL WAS CAUGHT OFF-GUARD, BUT SHE DOESN'T LOOK LIKE SHE WILL BE AGAIN!
IDEKA LINES UP HER SERVE--!
A HIGH NOON SHOT?! IS SHE SERIOUS?
IF SHE CAN LAND SUCH A TRICKY SERVE, WELL! YOU'RE IN FOR A TREAT, FOLKS!

IT MAY NOT BE ENOUGH THOUGH--
EVEN WITH THE SUN IN HER EYES, SAKI IS AN EXPERT AT CATCHING THESE HIGH LOBS!
WAIT...
DID YOU ANGLE IT TOWARD YOUR SIDE OF THE--

WHAK
AND IDEKA FOLLOWS IT UP WITH A BANKED SHOT!?
WHO IS THIS WUL, AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, IS SHE AVAILABLE?

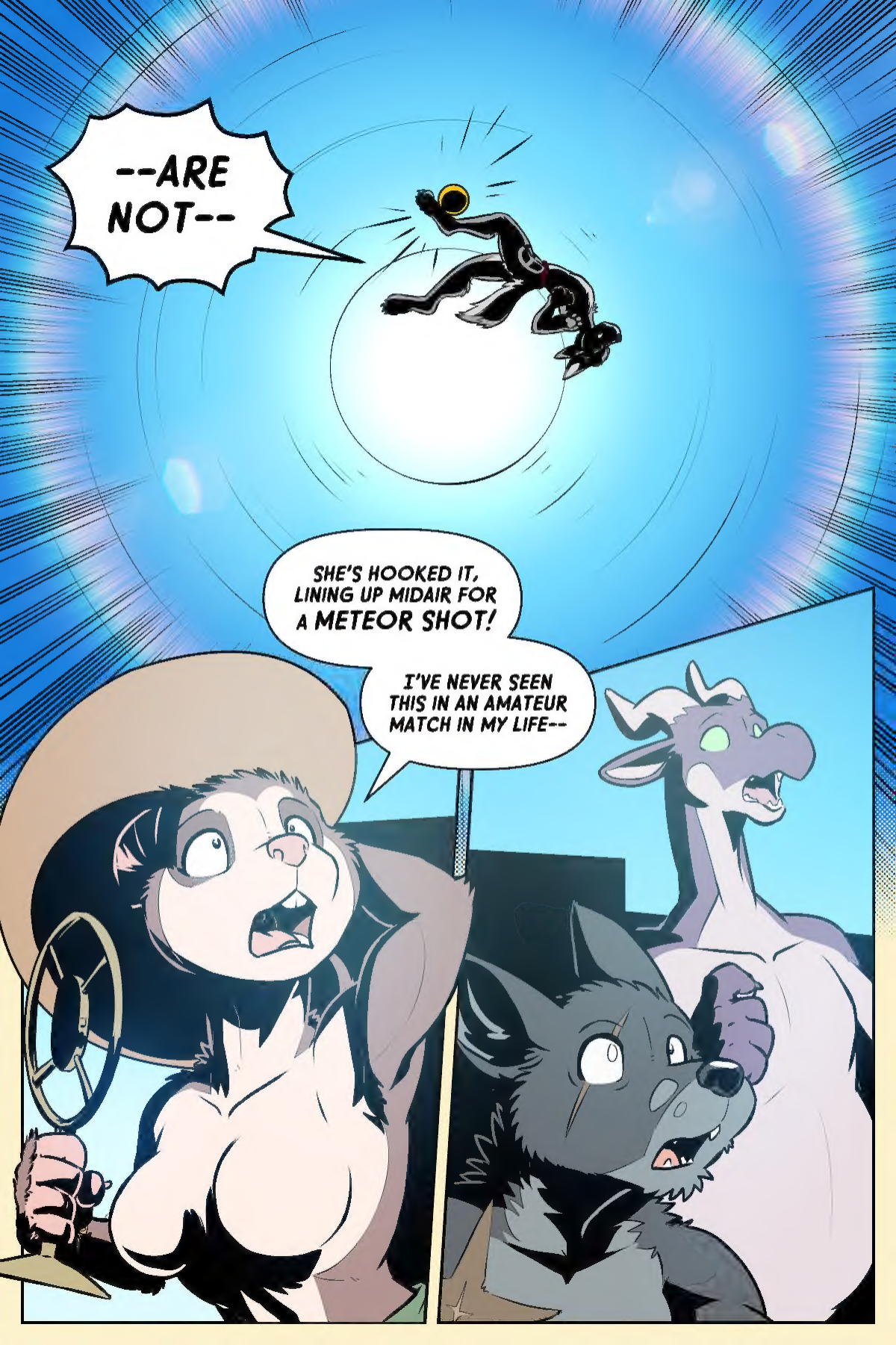
CRIK
OH GOOD, YOU DON'T NEED ME TO HOLD BACK~
YOU THINK I'M *CAPABLE* OF LOSING TO YOU?!
UH, IDEKA... IT'S A *GAME,* CALM DOWN AND *TRUST ME!*
EIGHT MINUTES TO GO AND THAT WAS ALREADY ONE OF THE MOST *INCREDIBLE* SERVES I'VE EVER SEEN-- WHAT ELSE DO THESE LOVELY LADIES HAVE IN STORE FOR US, I WONDER?
NOW THAT THEY'VE WARMED UP, I'M SURE WE'RE ABOUT TO WITNESS A REAL EXCHANGE...

AN EASY SERVE FROM SAKI
SHE'S LOOKING FOR A SET-UP OPPORTUNITY
SAKI SPIKES IT!

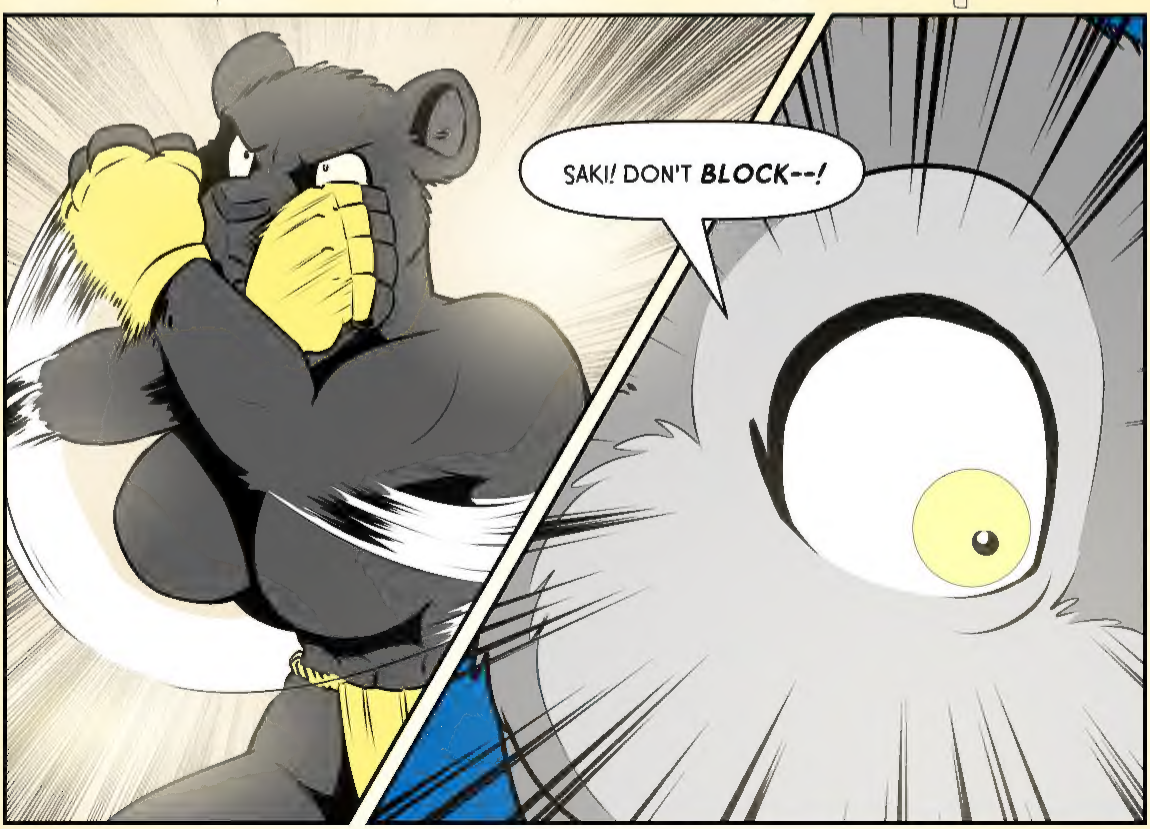
IDEKA KEEPS IT IN PLAY!
I CAN'T BELIEVE IT! AFTER A ROUGH START BY BOTH PLAYERS, THEY'VE RUN OUT THE CLOCK
WE'RE THREE MINUTES INTO OVERTIME WITH THE SCORE STILL AT ONE ALL!

IDEKA WITH SOME FANCY FOOTWORK
ALL THAT JUST TO SNEAKILY SLIP THE BALL OVER THE NET!
IDEKA, YOU DON'T HAVE TO WRECK YOURSELF FOR THIS!
YOU CAN CONCEDE!
A *SECOND* HIGH NOON SHOT! THIS ONE LOOKS LEGIT-- WHAT CAN IDEKA DO?
I *KNOW* YOU'RE GOADING ME, SAKI!

IDEKA'S LISTENING FOR THE BALL, TOO!
BUT I HAVE **NEVER** CONCEDED!
AND MY **FEARS**--
IS SHE CLIMBING THE BOUNDARY MARKER?!
--THAT I ***CONFIDED IN YOU***--


--ARE NOT--
SHE'S HOOKED IT, LINING UP MIDAIR FOR A METEOR SHOT!
I'VE NEVER SEEN THIS IN AN AMATEUR MATCH IN MY LIFE--

--A
GAME!
RUNE: FORCE MULTIPLIER X4


SAKI! DON'T BLOCK--!